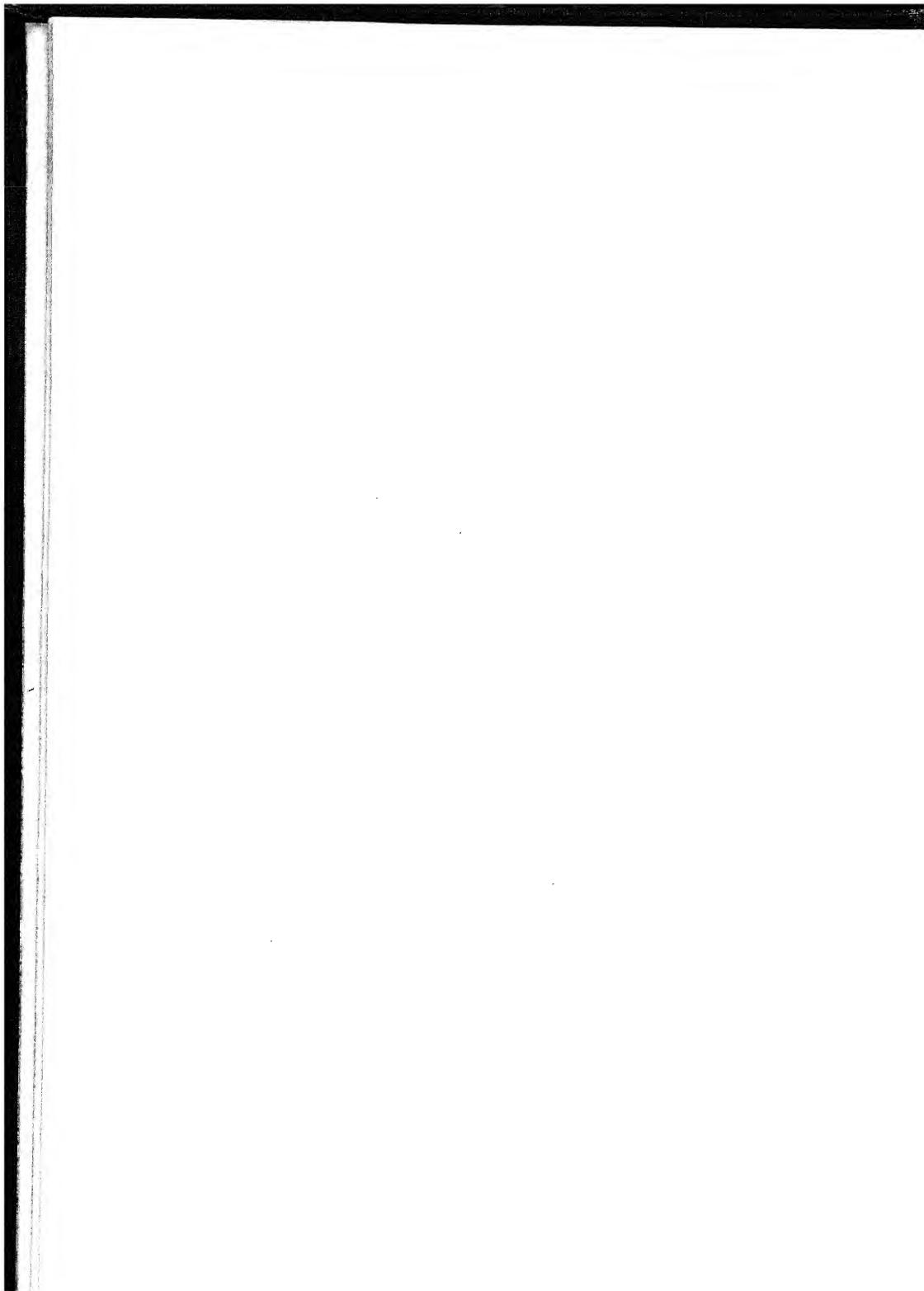


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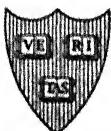


FRENCH CLASSICISM

BY

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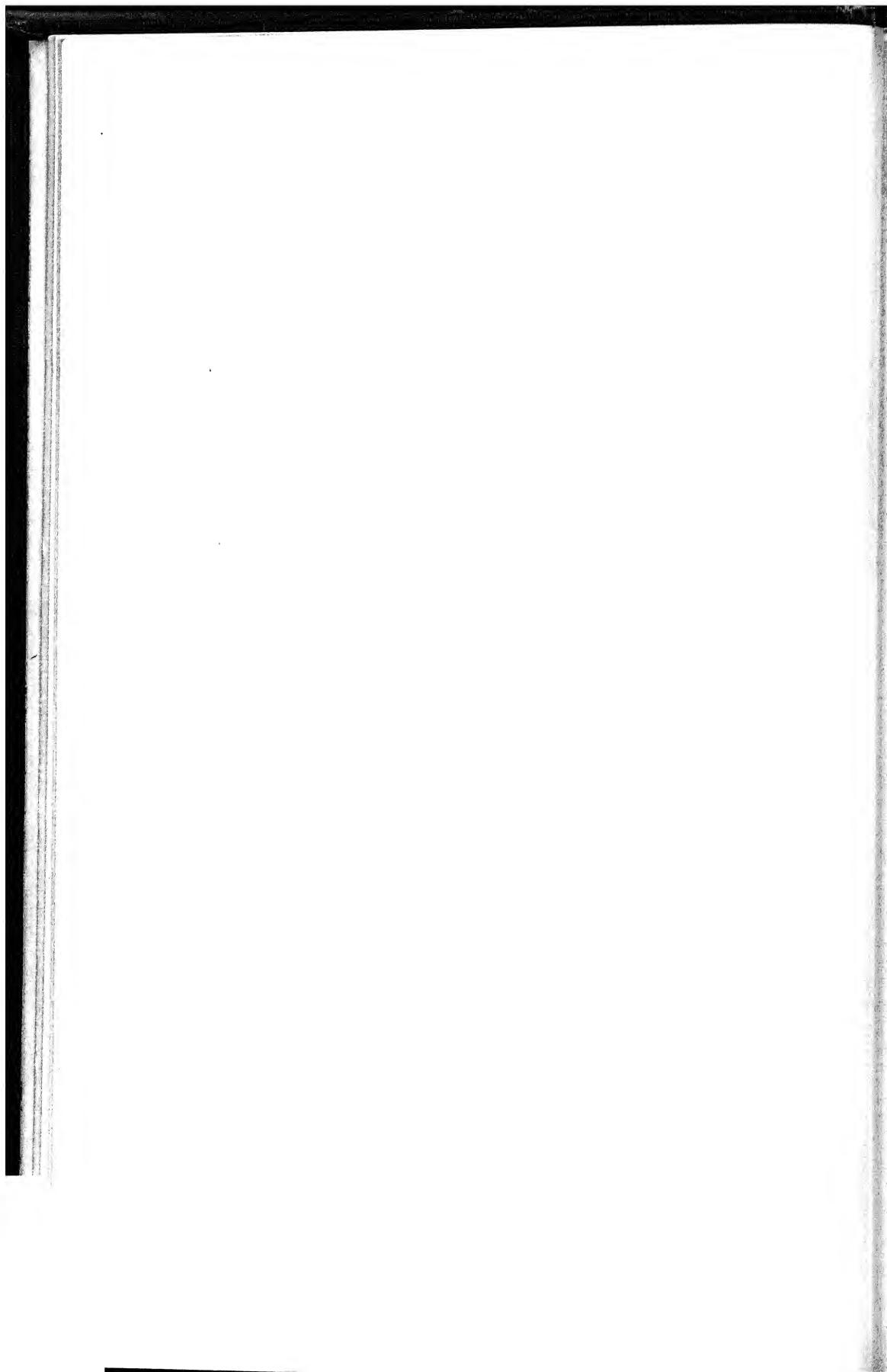
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TO
E. P. W.

SEP 23 1964

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PREFACE

INVESTIGATORS of the French classical age are prone to isolate the great writers of the seventeenth century. Students tend to feel, even when they know better, that Corneille and Racine were the undisputed leaders of the drama, that Boileau was the only spokesman for criticism. In this short volume I have emphasized the greater complexity of the age and have considered it also in its political and social environment. The perspective changes, and some great names give way to others less famous today: La Fontaine disappears somewhat behind a Rapin or a Bouhours.

I have not attempted an encyclopaedic survey, but rather an outline, in which I have sought to keep the chief ideas in the foreground, instead of making complete enumerations of works or exhaustive bibliographies. Yet, as the book is meant primarily for English-speaking students, I have sometimes included references which to the French specialist may seem elementary.

I have tried to show, with even less emphasis on the technical literary forms of the sixteenth century, that the classicism of the Renaissance deserves almost as serious consideration as that of the seventeenth century. In many ways, indeed, it is more akin to ancient classicism and is, at least in its ideals, often ethically superior to that of the age of Louis XIV. On the other hand, inasmuch as the social and literary forces of the eighteenth century became entangled with other forces, some of them foreign, I have thought it wise to stop with the seventeenth century.

The criticism is anticipated that, though I have been brief, I have included authors or books not strictly classical. I have purposely avoided isolating writers or treating their works as logical abstractions. I have sought to merge them with their times. If this semi-historical method has defects, it has very distinct corresponding advantages.

I am grateful to my colleagues, Professors J. D. M. Ford, C. H. Grandgent and E. S. Sheldon for useful suggestions made while the work has been going through the press, and for cordial help in reading proof.

C. H. C. W.

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